

The Lost Horizon Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Three former classmates from Oxford University are having drinks and reminiscing about a mutual friend, "Glory Conway." Conway had been a gifted student and athlete in college but never lived up to his promise. Rutherford says that Conway disappeared along with three other passengers in an airplane that was evacuating them from the war in Baskul to Peshawar. The airplane mysteriously vanished, and no one has heard of it or its passengers for months.

Rutherford says he came across Conway in a Roman Catholic hospital in Chung-Kiang. The two traveled together on a ship to Honolulu, but Conway left the ship suddenly. Rutherford has a manuscript that Conway dictated to him, which tells this story: Conway is one of four passengers being evacuated. The others are Roberta Brinklow, a missionary; Henry D. Barnard, an American oilman; and Captain Charles Mallinson, a British vice-consul. A night passes on the plane, and it comes to a bad landing to refuel. Mallinson notices that the plane is traveling in the wrong direction. He wants to "jump" the pilot, but the pilot is armed and they are not. They travel over a mountain range that seems as high as the ones near Mount Everest and land in a remote frontier. Conway believes they are somewhere in an unexplored region of Tibet.

The pilot dies in the landing. The four passengers survive. A group of natives lead them to a local settlement called Shangri-La. The leader of the natives, an elderly Chinese man riding in a sedan chair, becomes the passengers' guide. Shangri-La boasts a lamasery near a perfectly shaped mountain called Blue Moon. In the valley below is a settlement of people. The passengers stay in the colorful pavilions of the lamasery and speak with Chang over fine foods. They are amazed that Shangri-La has modern amenities like porcelain bathtubs. Chang explains that porters come in and out of Shangri-La with these goods. When the next porters come in a month, the four passengers may leave with them.

The four visitors enjoy the immense library, the beautiful gardens and the music of Shangri-La, with one exception. Mallinson wants to leave as soon as possible and considers himself to be kidnapped. Chang and Conway discuss the philosophy of the lamasery, which is moderation in all things. One should even be moderate in virtues like honesty and chastity. Conway finds himself falling under the spell of the tranquility and peace of Shangri-La. He is losing any sense of passion or ambition.

Meanwhile Mallinson and Barnard wonder where the monks get their money. Miss Brinklow questions their morals and wants to convert them to Christianity. Chang introduces Conway to a beautiful Manchu woman who plays the harpsichord. When Conway falls in love with the woman, Chang says any relationship with her will be only spiritual. Chang knows this from his own experience with her. She is actually very, very old, although she appears to be around twenty years.

The High Lama requests to meet Conway. He gives Conway an elaborate history of Shangri-La, which was founded by a 53-year-old friar named Father Perrault in 1734,



who eventually lost contact with the Vatican. The High Lama spends all his days in clairvoyant meditation. He lost any sense of human passion by age one hundred or so. Conway correctly guesses that the High Lama is Father Perrault himself.

Barnard is revealed to be a fugitive from the law. He discovers that the townspeople in the valley are mining gold. He wants to take over the operation and split the money with Conway. He has no desire to leave Shangri-La because he will only get arrested. Miss Brinklow wishes to stay and convert the people to Christianity. That leaves only Mallinson, who is becoming more discontent every day. He is falling in love with the Manchu musician.

In an extraordinary turn of events, the High Lama meets with Conway four more times. He has never before requested a meeting until after a visitor has been in Shangri-La for at least five years, but he considers Conway worthy. At the fifth meeting he asks Conway to take over as High Lama, and then he himself falls dead. Conway finally confides the history of Shangri-La to Mallinson, who considers it all impossible nonsense. No one could live that long. Mallinson, Conway and the Manchu make their way out of Shangri-La and never intend to return.

The story returns to Rutherford and his friends. Rutherford relates his search for Conway, who disappeared on a banana boat to Fiji. He and the narrator are certain that Mallinson died and Conway went back to Shangri-La. One point is that an elderly Chinese woman brought Conway to the hospital. Could this mean that the story of Shangri-La is true?



Prologue

Prologue Summary

The narrator (Woodford Green) is having drinks with Rutherford, a novelist, and Wyland Tertius, a secretary of a British embassy at the Tempelhof airport near Berlin. All three are old school chums. They have a good view of the airplanes as they chat. The meeting is not as interesting as the narrator anticipated.

A young man named Sanders joins them. He has been in the Service in Baskul, a town in Persia. He tells a strange story of how he and others were evacuating people from Baskul to Peshawar in May 1931. One plane completely disappeared with four passengers: three men and one female missionary.

The others are acquainted with one of the passengers, "Glory" Conway. They all went to Oxford University together with him. Since then, each has seen Conway a few times. At university, Conway was an extraordinarily brilliant student. He was a "Renaissance man" who excelled at many things like music, sports, drama and languages. He gave an oration in Greek. He was very tall, good-looking and athletic. Conway seemed destined for a great career, perhaps as Prime Minister of England. His ho-hum career in the Consular Service disappointed many of his professors and surprised others who knew him and appreciated his great promise.

Rutherford and the narrator retire to Rutherford's hotel for more drinks and conversation. They continue to talk about how wonderful Conway was. The narrator says Conway was very kind to him on one occasion. Conway seemed destined for greatness. Rutherford remarks that he has read the narrator's book on neurology. The narrator is surprised because the book is technical and of limited interest. Rutherford says he read it because he believes Conway may have amnesia.

Rutherford tells the narrator that he actually saw Conway a few months ago. He relates the story of how they traveled together from Shanghai to Honolulu on a Japanese ship last November: Conway and Rutherford meet in an unusual way. A French Mother Superior on her way to Chung-Kiang strikes up a conversation with Rutherford. She mentions that she is bringing a European man back to China with her.

The Mother Superior says that the European is dressed in the worst kind of clothing and has been very sick. He speaks fluent French, English, Chinese and Hindustani. The Mother Superior takes Rutherford to her hospital in Chung-Kiang where he recognizes Conway. Rutherford stays with Conway for two weeks. Conway does not know who he is. As Conway recovers from his illness, the two men sail to Nanking and then take a train to Shanghai. They board a Japanese liner to San Francisco.

A famous pianist comes onboard ship at Yohohama. After he gives a recital, Conway sits down to play a "rapid lively piece" that no one recognizes. The professional



musician asks who wrote it. Conway insists it is an unpublished work by Chopin that was given to him by a student of Chopin. Then Conway plays still another unpublished "Chopin" piece. The famous pianist insists that such great music by Chopin could not have been kept hidden since 1849, the year of Chopin's death. Everyone would be playing such music.

Later during the same voyage, Conway becomes very depressed. He sits down with Rutherford for almost twenty hours and pours out his heart to him. As their ship nears Honolulu, Conway gives Rutherford the slip by joining the crew of a banana boat going south to Fiji. Rutherford learns this when Conway writes Rutherford three months later about the Fiji boat and pays him the money he owed him.

Rutherford says that Conway did tell him how he ended up in Chung-Kiang. It is a very long story and all in a manuscript Rutherford has prepared. The narrator keeps the manuscript and intends to return it to Rutherford when he reaches England. The narrator is unable to return the manuscript because he receives a note from Rutherford saying he is going to Kashmir.

Prologue Analysis

Rutherford is interested in Conway's story because he is a novelist. He is no doubt trying to track Conway down in Kashmir. Conway emerges as a mystical, mysterious character. The episode of the Chopin music is one indication that Conway is not operating in the same everyday world everyone else inhabits. He must have a certain charisma because his former classmates remember him years later. He seems to be a man who did not live up to his potential to become a world leader or famous musician.

The realistic details in this Prologue are important. Rutherford and the narrator will be checking out a fantastic story that defies conventional wisdom and laws of physics. Every fact they can validate (such as Conway's admittance to a hospital, the unknown Chopin piano piece and Conway's amnesia) becomes important to proving the legend of Shangri-La.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

In May 1931, the political situation in Baskul worsens. The British Air Force evacuates white residents to Peshawar. The Maharajah of Chandapore loans his private aircraft to evacuate four people: Roberta Brinklow of the Eastern Mission; Henry D. Barnard, an American; Hugh Conway, H.M. Consul; and Captain Charles Mallinson, H.M. Vice-Consul.

Conway is 37 years old and has served ten years in consulate service, the last two years in Baskul. Baskul is not considered a very good post in consulate service, but Conway prefers adventure to plum posts. Mallinson is in his middle-twenties and stationed in Baskul because he failed his examinations.

Miss Brinklow is a missionary with the L.M.S. or London Missionary Service. She is not pretty or young, but she is a strong and healthy woman. Bernard has "something to do with oil." Nobody knows much about him. He is a large, heavy-set man with a "hard-bitten" face. As the plane takes off, Mallinson wonders aloud to Conway that the pilot is not Fenner, the person who was supposed to fly them to Peshawar. Conway says it does not matter. Mallinson insists that this pilot is going off course. Conway is offhand about things. He assumes they will get to Peshawar, and he doesn't have anyone to meet him there anyway.

The plane begins to descend. When Mallinson and Conway look out the windows, they see only desolate frontier, not a city. Conway says perhaps Mallinson is right and that this pilot is indeed lost. For a few frantic minutes, it seems as if the plane will crash. It swoops and falls much too quickly. When it lands, a "swarm of bearded and turbaned tribesmen" surround the plane, which is getting new fuel. Conway asks the pilot what's going on. The pilot waves his revolver at him. The plane takes off for a second time.

Mallinson is convinced they are being kidnapped. The American tries to make jokes, noting that anyone in a pilot's uniform could take over a plane. Meanwhile Conway collects bits of paper and writes SOS messages in different languages. He drops the messages to earth at intervals.

The plane continues to fly on an unknown course. Conway falls asleep. The others agree that it is good to have Conway aboard because of his courage and knowledge of languages. Conway is not actually sleeping but thinking. He is concerned about having a woman with them. He analyzes the other passengers' situations: the American is probably married, Mallinson is no doubt engaged and Miss Brinklow has a vocation. All of these commitments make them more anxious and vulnerable. Conway is dismayed that the others think he knows what to do.



The plane seems to be traveling east, based on the direction of the sun. Conway and the others talk about "jumping the pilot," since there are three male passengers versus the one pilot. The problem is that they are unarmed and the pilot has a revolver. Conway opens the glass compartment that separates the pilot's cockpit from their quarters. The pilot pulls his gun, and Conway gives up on the daring plan. The men have a cigar and chat. Then, the entire company falls asleep. Conway awakes to see that the plane is flying over snowy peaks with huge glaciers of ice.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The Prologue and Epilogue are separate from the actual story or "manuscript" left in the hands of the narrator, Woodford Green. This chapter begins the actual story of the "lost horizon." Very little is said about Bernard, the American. Mallinson emerges as sometimes in opposition to the leader, Conway. Mallinson is young and impetuous, and this goes against Conway's cooler judgment. The contrast between these two characters is a theme of the book. One person "goes with the flow" and enjoys the challenges and surprises of life. The other is more controlling and wants his own agenda in place. This foreshadows their later reactions to Shangri-La.

There is a mystery about where the plane is headed and why it is going to such a remote place. This chapter sets up certain questions that will be answered later. Are the passengers being taken somewhere on purpose? Were these four people in particular chosen to go to this place? Who is Barnard anyway?



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Mallinson and Conway try to figure out where the plane is. Conway thinks the vast mountain range beneath them may be the Karakoram. They speculate on why they are being brought there, wherever "there" is. Night falls, and the plane hits some turbulence. Conway marvels at the remoteness and inaccessibility of the area.

Mallinson cannot figure out where they are. Conway speculates that they are probably flying over Tibet. Conway has experience in mountain climbing, and this area is harder to climb than Everest. Mallinson is convinced the pilot is crazy. Miss Brinklow agrees the pilot is insane. She has heard from other missionaries that Tibetans are odd people who believe that mankind is descended from monkeys. This is a legend, not Darwinism. The passengers settle down for the night. Conway wonders when they will run out of fuel.

There are some loud clapping noises and lurching movements. The plane lands badly. A tire explodes. Everyone stands up. They appear to be at the end of the world somewhere. Their pilot is huddled forward and unconscious. Conway removes the pilot's revolver. The men take the pilot out of the plane. He is unconscious but still alive. Miss Brinklow, in a move that surprises the men because she is a missionary, carries brandy in her purse. Now she offers it to the pilot to revive him.

Conway is fairly sure that they are beyond the western range of the Himalayas toward the Kien-Lun, a mountainous area. He knows this is an unexplored, uninhabited place. When he steps outside the plane, he sees a perfect mountain, but he does not bother to point it out to the others. The altitude and cold weather affect the four passengers as they try to sleep in these unknown mountains.

In the morning, the men move the pilot into the sunlight. He revives and speaks to Conway. He passes away about mid-morning. Conway relates that the pilot said they were in Tibet near a place called Shangri-La. The inhabitants of Shangri-La could help them find food and shelter. Mallinson believes the pilot was crazy: why listen to him? Conway says that their only hope is finding other human beings. They do not have equipment and supplies. Conway says they should start at once toward the lamasery the pilot mentioned. Mallinson dissents, but they begin the journey. Conway believes that Buddhist monks are unlikely to murder them. As they walk, they see the shadowy figures of men ahead.

Chapter 2 Analysis

The author presents four very different personalities whose lives are at stake in a remote, unknown place. He also portrays a destitute remoteness. The characters are in a part of the world that no one has ever seen or explored. One theme of the book is that civilization corrupts. Therefore, a perfect utopia can only exist in a remote area far from



the "contamination" of civilization. At this point in the book, this theme is only foreshadowed. Mallinson and Conway are still trying to orient themselves in a conventional way with geography and science. They will find that Shangri-La is not about science and conventional wisdom.

Miss Brinklow, instead of being a liability, is one of the most adaptable of the four. Mallinson continues to show bad judgment because he is committed to his agenda. He cannot "think outside the box." Conway is more willing to let himself experience and learn new things, which is why he will be more successful in Shangri-La. Because the four passengers realize that they are helpless without other human beings, they will be dependent upon whoever shows up.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

About a dozen men approach the four passengers. They are carrying a blue-robed, elderly man in a hooded chair. As they come closer, Conway sees that the man is Chinese and wearing a silk embroidered gown. The man speaks perfect English. He says his name is Chang. Conway introduces each of the four passengers. Chang offers to be their guide. Mallinson wants Chang to guide them back to civilization. Chang asks why they think they are not in civilization.

The Tibetans are dressed in sheepskins, fur hats and yak skin boots. They offer the passengers fruit and wine. Chang and Conway chat about the beautiful mountain with its perfect cone-shape. The mountain is called Karakal, and the Tibetans know it well. The inhabitants of the lamasery, who study trigonometry and the measurement of mountains, have even measured Karakal.

The group resumes the climb to the top of the mountains. Breathing is very difficult in that altitude, so no one can speak readily. Chang travels in his chair. The ascent gets even harder after they walk a few miles. It grows colder and windier. There is sleet and the sound of avalanches. The Tibetans pull out ropes to tie the climbers together for better safety. The climbing is very difficult and steep at first. Then, it gets easier. Finally, they must climb next to a deep abyss, and it has started to rain.

The party changes direction and moves downhill. Mallinson is terrified. Conway says the best thing to do is nothing at all, just "go with the flow." Mallinson refuses to accept the situation and wants to get away from this place. Conway tries to put things in perspective. If they were still in Baskul, they would be captives and subject to torture. The party of Tibetans and Europeans comes to the lamasery, called Shangri-La. It has several pavilions as colorful as flowers underneath the splendor of Karakal. Conway thinks that Karakal will destroy Shangri-La one day through an avalanche.

The thin air makes everyone light-headed. Chang apologizes for not speaking on the journey and shows the Europeans to their living quarters. Then, Chang invites them for dinner. Mallinson says that after dinner they need to start making plans to get away.

Chapter 3 Analysis

The long elaborate trek to Shangri-La again carries out the theme of complete and utter remoteness. The travelers cannot communicate with one another, and this adds to the sense of isolation. The rope that binds them is a symbol of the four passengers' total dependence upon these exotic strangers. Shangri-La is a paradise. It is suitably built "at the top of the world" and at the highest peaks of the earth.



Conway already has an eastern attitude that sometimes it is better to do nothing rather than to take action. Mallinson portrays the apex of Western thought, the desire for immediate action. Conway is open to making friends with Chang and taking in the beauty of the scenery. However, he has not confided to Chang that he speaks Chinese. Conway is adaptable and can be simultaneously open and devious.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Mallinson, Conway, Barnard and Brinklow are surprised to find the Tibetan monastery equipped with modern amenities, including porcelain bathtubs and central heating. Conway even reads the words "Akron, Ohio" on his tub. Chang eats very little and does not take wine. For dinner, he has only a salad. This makes Conway believe he has an illness.

At dinner, Conway asks if the community has visitors. Chang replies that they rarely do. Their community survives without "contamination" from the outside world. Contamination can come in many forms, such as dance bands or movies. Miss Brinklow asks how many monks live here, what nationalities they are and other direct questions. Chang says there are fifty members of many races, but most are Chinese and Tibetan. He sidesteps her questions about the exact practices and beliefs of the monks.

When Conway questions him further, Chang says their main belief is in moderation. They even believe in being moderately virtuous, moderately sober, moderately chaste and only moderately honest. Conway is fascinated by this concept. Mallinson interrupts, saying that this is all very interesting, but when can they go home? He wants Chang to provide them with porters to lead them back to civilization.

Chang says it is impossible to hurry such matters. Mallinson says they have family and friends who are worried about them. He insists that they must leave as soon as possible. Mallinson asks Chang to supply a map of the way out if he can't supply porters. Mallinson says he knows they have contact with the outside world. He can tell this by the equipment they have. When Chang refuses to answer his questions, Mallinson gets up and retires to his room.

Chang says that Mallinson will recover by tomorrow. Conway tries to smooth things over and says Mallinson is impetuous and young. Chang says Conway is wiser than Mallinson. Conway himself inquires about porters. Chang says that is hard to arrange. Conway asks how Chang arranged porters to come that morning to bring them to Shangri-La. When Chang gives no exact answer, Conway wonders if this whole capture was planned.

Chang reassures Conway that they are in no danger and that the best thing to do is to enjoy their stay. The two enjoy the moonlight over Karakal, which means "Blue Moon."

Conway mulls over the idea that they have been kidnapped, and that as a British consul, it is his duty to compel the monks to let them go. The truth is that Conway is enjoying the adventure. He considers his job to be an adventure and finds this place to be interesting and agreeable.



Mallinson begins to accept the idea that because these people are Oriental, things will move slowly and inefficiently. He wonders if he has insulted them. After breakfast, Chang comes around and speaks in English. Conway has not let him know that he speaks Chinese. Chang is willing to speak to Conway about leaving Shangri-La because Conway is wise. Chang confides that a consignment will arrive soon, and the passengers can leave when it comes. They can employ the porters who bring the consignment. It may be a month, or it may be two months before the porters arrive. Mallinson gets angry and says, "it may be four or five months!" He continues to speak angrily, but Chang leaves to avoid embarrassment.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Conway has no close family or women friends. He does not care when he goes back home. He enjoys the adventure and exotic feel of Shangri-La. His travels in China taught him to handle himself slowly and formally in such a culture. On the other hand, Mallinson is direct and insulting and cares only about leaving as soon as possible. He does not enjoy the "journey." In a philosophical sense, Conway knows how to savor the journey of life. Mallinson does not.

The visitors are surprised that a monastery has modern conveniences like bathtubs. Life as a monk is usually pictured as austere and full of hardships and self-denial. The author is saying that human paradise has to be a blend of physical comfort and beauty along with spiritual attainment.

Again in this chapter, the theme of civilization as a corrupting force is made clear in Chang's and the other residents' attitudes about movies, modern music and newspapers. Conway wonders if the residents of Shangri-La brought him and the others there on purpose. This contrasts with Miss Brinklow's notion that God is behind everything.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Mallinson is angry that the four Europeans have to stay at Shangri-La for two months. Conway tries to reason with him that a Consul is always sent to odd places. Conway asks the others if they will be missed. Barnard says he never writes letters, so no one will notice his absence. Mallinson has a girlfriend and family in England who will mind if he is missing. He wants to leave as soon as possible. Miss Brinklow is surprisingly non-committal about being "kidnapped."

Conway advises them to get along as best they can: no quarrels. Barnard and Mallinson speculate about how the monks get money. One theory is that they have a millionaire supporter. Chang offers to give them a tour of the buildings. Mallinson refers to him as a "chink." Conway is not a racist and has enjoyed the company of Chinese people in his travels. He sees Chang as a person of high intelligence. Mallinson and the others judge Chang in a more stereotypical way.

After the tour, the men are more puzzled than ever about how the monks get their money. Miss Brinklow believes they may be immoral. On the other hand, Conway has truly enjoyed the treasures the monks own. Some paintings, tapestries and ceramics are of museum quality. The monastery has a huge library of about thirty thousand books in English, French, Russian, German and Chinese. Mallinson would like a map. Chang says they have many books of maps, but Shangri-La is not on them.

Miss Brinklow wants to watch the lamas at work. Chang says it's impossible. Mostly the lamas devote themselves to contemplation, and no one is allowed to watch them. She demands again to know what they do. Chang says they devote themselves to the pursuit of wisdom. Miss Brinklow says that pursuing wisdom is not doing anything. Chang agrees that they do nothing.

The party of four visitors follows Chang into a garden where they have tea near a pool full of statues and artwork. They go into a pavilion that boasts a piano and harpsichord. Barnard has trouble believing that they could drag the piano up the route they came through yesterday. Chang says they enjoy classical music and do not keep up with modern musical trends. Barnard again asks about money. Chang refuses to answer Barnard's question, which highlights the divide between them.

A beautiful Chinese girl of indeterminate age sits down to play the harpsichord and then leaves after playing a gavotte by Rameau. Chang tells the group that this girl is Lo-Tsen and that women lamas live at the retreat. The inhabitants have no sex distinctions. Chang refuses to give her age, which Conway estimates between thirteen and thirty.

After dinner, Conway goes for a walk. He realizes that he is immensely happy in Shangri-La. He enjoys the moonlight and the smell of roses and wonders if he could



climb down into a valley where another town may exist. Conway believes he hears music and voices. Two men are talking about the burial of someone named "Talu" who "obeyed the high ones of Shangri-La." Talu brought strangers here and was held up by a bird. Conway is more convinced than ever that the four of them were brought to this place by a plan, not by chance. Everything points to a "high directing intelligence." He finds the problem challenging.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Conway believes that something purposefully brought them to Shangri-La, but he is not sure who or why. It is his nature to take things as they come, to enjoy the journey, so he does not fret about this problem. Instead, he enjoys it as a challenge. Miss Brinklow, on the other hand, believes in "Providence." In addition to the theme of higher and moving powers, the author again explores the idea that human utopia must be physically comfortable. Shangri-La has gardens, art treasures, lush food and a library of thirty thousand books. No one seems to work at anything.

This book was written between the two World Wars. During that period, there was a lot of public interest in utopias and perfect societies. German Nazism, Italian Fascism and Soviet Communism could be considered experiments in perfect societies. Many intellectuals participated in forums devoted to the perfectibility of mankind and the creation of a perfect equal society. *The Lost Horizon* can be seen in that context. This book was so popular that it was the first to be printed as a paperback.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

The four visitors fall into the daily routine of monastery life. They appreciate the warm days and cold nights, enjoy walks and leisure, develop tastes in food and drink and borrow books from the library. When Barnard wants a newspaper, Chang says they have copies of the London Times. However, Barnard cannot expect to read the most recent ones.

Chang and Conway travel by bamboo chair to the lower levels of the valley. Conway wants to look at the crops and irrigation system. Miss Brinklow is interested in the religions practiced in the valley, such as Taoist and Confucianism. Chang says that many religions are "moderately true." Miss Brinklow replies that when she returns, she will ask the L.M.S. to send them a missionary. Perhaps she would like the post herself, Barnard says. Miss Brinklow says, "there's no good in doing a thing because you like it."

Miss Brinklow decides to begin her conversion efforts by learning their language. Chang enthusiastically gives her a language book. Meanwhile, Conway makes full use of the massive library. Chang takes pride that the books are recent. Conway says they are not up-to-date at all, since the most recent book is a year old. A lot happens in a year. In Chang's mind, though, nothing much happens quickly. He has a different sense of time than the average Englishman.

Conway likes Chang and also enjoys the little Chinese girl who plays music for them. Mallinson says she looks like an ivory doll. Conway says she has more virtues than most women in Europe, whom he finds difficult to please. Conway was engaged once. His fiancée did not want to live in Peking, so she broke it off.

Conway finds that the secrets Chang keeps are inconsistent. Some topics are very much off bounds. Yet Chang is open about what goes on in the valley, including its government. These people are great believers in etiquette and good manners. Little courtesies are very important to prevent crime and smooth out problems. Because everyone is taught from childhood to be courteous, there is very little need for formal government. There is no crime. They do not vote on laws because they do not have the concept that one law is right and another is wrong.

Mallinson confides to Conway that the group knows nothing about Barnard. No one has seen his passport. Mallinson looks at it and finds out it is a forged passport under the name Chalmers Bryant. In addition to the passport, Barnard has newspaper clippings about the search for the lost Bryant.

Conway says it does not matter here who Bryant or Barnard is. If it is a police matter, then they should let the police handle it when they get home. It is awkward to arrest a traveling companion. Mallinson takes a more black and white view of the law. It is their



duty to help catch Bryant. The Bryant group on Wall Street has caused a crash in the markets and lost people millions of dollars.

Later that night, Conway, Mallinson and Barnard share cigars. The American asks them if they know who he is. They admit they do. Miss Brinklow says she figured he was traveling incognito when he said no one would miss him. Barnard wants the matter to be left alone for the time being. Conway agrees this is reasonable.

Barnard says he has been running away for a long time. He had thought it might be easier to hide in the revolution at Baskul, but decided on the plane trip. This place suits him fine because it is so far away from the people hunting him down. Conway says he knows little of high finance. Barnard says there's nothing to know except that when you start to lose, people blame you for their losses and want your skin. Mallinson argues that those people thought Barnard would keep their money in safe investments and that Barnard is a crook.

Conway finds it interesting that three of the four captives want to be captive. Barnard wants to conceal himself, and this is a good place for it. Miss Brinklow wants to convert the Tibetans. Conway himself is enjoying the place. Only Mallinson wants to leave. As he takes his evening stroll, Conway reflects on just how happy Shangri-La has made him. He feels content and fulfilled there. He loves the beauty of the place. He feels a deep calm in his soul. He pictures his return to someplace in India, having drinks with other officials, preparing reports and returning to England. All of it seems very distasteful to him.

Chang interrupts Conway's reverie with important news. Conway has been chosen to have a meeting with the High Lama. No one has ever been received so quickly. The High Lama wishes to see him immediately. Although it is late at night, Chang guides Conway to the place of the High Lama.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Conway is a philosophical man who seeks peace. He finds it in Shangri-La. He rides on a sedan chair as an equal to Chang. This symbolizes that Conway is spiritually developed. Miss Brinklow, on the other hand, is a strong believer in Christianity. She does not believe that all religions are moderately true. She is a fanatic about her own religion. She has a purpose in staying in Shangri-La. Instead of appreciating the place on its own merits, she wants to convert everyone to her religion.

Conway does not take a fanatical view of things. He can see the gray areas in life. This puts his character in contrast not only to Miss Brinklow, but also to Mallinson. Mallinson is ready to condemn Barnard by the letter of the law, not by judging the whole circumstance of Barnard's life. These personality styles conflict here and throughout the book.

Barnard or Bryant would have been a particularly hated villain in 1933, just a few years after the great stock market crash of 1929. Many people lost fortunes because of

speculators like him. In 1933 when this book was published, many readers would be blaming their woes on financial speculators like Bryant.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

A lifelong diplomat, Conway has met other potentates. Nevertheless, he is excited to meet the High Lama. In particular, he wants to see if some of his theories about Shangri-La are correct. Chang leads Conway up a spiral stairway and through some corridors. The atmosphere and air become heavier and darker until they enter an apartment with a low roof. The High Lama sits alone at a chair next to a table. Chang leaves them alone.

The High Lama is a wizened old man who is very polite and speaks perfect English. As they begin a tea ceremony, Conway confesses that he has lived in China for a few years (a fact he has not shared with Chang). According to custom, they chat only in small talk until the tea bowls are taken away. Then the High Lama begins a complex history of Shangri-La.

During the Middle Ages, Nestorian Christianity spread through Asia. In the 1600s, the Vatican sent Jesuit Missionaries to Asia and established a mission in Lhasa. Four Capuchin friars set off from Peking in 1719, to find any remnants of Nestorian Christianity. Three died along the way, but one came to the valley of the Blue Moon. He was from Luxembourg, and his name was Father Perrault. He was a scholar who had studied all over Europe. The people of the Blue Moon welcomed Father Perrault and helped nurse him back to health.

When he got well, the friar decided to turn the Buddhist monastery into a Christian one. He took residence there in 1734, when he was 53 years old. He was not prejudiced against some of their local customs, such as using a berry as a narcotic. He enjoyed working physically side by side with the ordinary people there.

Father Perrault sent regular reports back to Peking but heard nothing until 1769, when a stranger brought him a letter from the Vatican, asking him to come to Rome. He was by this time too old to trek over the mountains and sent a negative reply that the Vatican may or may not have received.

Even at age 98, Perrault was still studying and learning. He took up yoga. In the year 1789, the people thought that Perrault was dying. He said good-bye to everyone and took to his bed, but he did not die. Instead, he was granted a vision that involved taking drugs and doing deep-breathing exercises. He was regarded as a holy man, a god and a miracle-worker. Pilgrims sought his blessing. Because he had cheated death, he began to live the life he always wanted. He studied languages and did translations, among other things.

Henschell was a young Austrian who came to the valley of the Blue Moon around this period. As a young man, he had fought against Napoleon. He was mostly interested in



the gold deposits. Henschell planned to mine the gold and take it back with him. Instead, he became a great friend of Father Perrault. He devised the system of getting goods from the outside world into Shangri-La by trading them for gold. Henschell brought Shangri-La books and art pieces and allowed visitors to come and go as they pleased. He was killed by a porter during the Indian Mutiny.

At this point, the High Lama shows Conway a picture of Henschell, sketched just before his death. It shows a handsome young man with a feminine aspect. Conway is amazed at his youth. If Henschell came in 1803, then he was over a hundred when he was killed! Conway says that it seems impossible and beyond belief, but...he believes that the High Lama is actually Father Perrault!

Chapter 7 Analysis

Conway must be an extraordinary man if the High Lama wants to meet him after just a short time. Again, the theme recurs that Shangri-La can be both a material paradise where money is no problem and work does not matter and a place of spiritual fulfillment. The High Lama is a fascinating character. He is a European who has taken on Chinese culture and values. He was a Roman Catholic priest sent to convert Asians who gave up his religion and culture to take on native ways. He is not above tricking the Vatican.

The High Lama's story has many fantastic elements. The most fantastic element is Father Perrault's timeline. He arrives in Shangri-La around 1720, becomes a monk in Shangri at age 53 in 1754, almost dies around 1789, and is still alive in 1931, when Conway visits. Yet Conway goes into the mental reality of the High Lama and accepts what he says without arguing or challenging him. This foreshadows Mallinson's attitude that everything the High Lama says is a fantastic lie.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

After Conway guesses that the High Lama is Father Perrault, there is a strange pause that reminds Conway of pauses in musical phrasing. The High Lama is telepathic and picks up on Conway's thoughts. They talk about music and favorite composers. Conway asks him if the four travelers have to stay there forever. The High Lama prefers to call it "staying for good." Conway wants to know why these four people (him, Bryant, Brinklow and Mallinson) were chosen. The High Lama says they were chosen on the basis of age, nationality, race and other classifications. The lamas want new people from new groups. For instance, they have never had an American.

The High Lama says they haven't had visitors for twenty years. One of their young people came up with the idea of using an airplane, a modern means to circumvent the problems of the mountains. This man was Talu, and everyone liked him. They were all sorry when Talu died after the airplane landing. Next the High Lama asks that Conway keep secrets from his three companions. They should not be told anything of what was said.

The High Lama says that if Conway stays in Shangri-La, he will remain at his current age (40) for several decades. Even at 80, he will still be able to climb a mountain. At 160, he will be somewhat decayed but still have his faculties. He will lose muscle and the enjoyment of physical appetites, but he will achieve wisdom and profundity. He is offering Conway "time."

Conway admits that he is not an ambitious man. He does not want what passes for success in his field. He has no family or close friends and considers himself lazy. He feels that he really spent himself during World War I. The war changed him and took a lot out of him. The High Lama replies that here he can achieve "passionlessness." This will give him clarity of mind and peace. Conway thinks it all over and replies that he does not want to leave Shangri-La at present. That is not the same as wanting to stay there for a hundred years.

The High Lama says that there is a vision here: one of a world free of lust, war and brutality. Shangri-La is where the transient things in life like beauty endure. He believes that in today's world, nations are strengthening all the wrong things like violence and the will to destroy others. Someday soon they will all kill each other off in "organized homicide." The lamas hope Shangri-La will escape the world's fate. Once the strong devour each other, "the meek shall inherit the earth."

Conway is moved by the old man's words. He kneels down in front of him and says, "I understand, Father." After this talk, Chang leads Conway through the moonlit pavilions and pools and back to his room. It is very late. The others are already asleep. Conway has never felt so serene and happy.



Chapter 8 Analysis

In this chapter, the High Lama seems to sell his vision of Shangri-La to Conway. He wants Conway to stay. Conway, though, is already without passion and ambition. He does not care if he lives to be 200 years old or not, which is a main selling point of Shangri-La. In many ways, Conway is a man who wastes his talent and drifts through life. Later, when Conway tries to prove to himself that the High Lama's story is true, he will recall the telepathic elements that he experienced but that are not provable in a scientific sense. The parts about Talu seem real, too.

This book was a very popular one. The idea of monks in Tibet who live to an impossibly old age lingers today. There are stories of people who live on yogurt in the distant mountains and remain vigorous well after a hundred years of life.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

At breakfast the next morning, Conway's three traveling companions bombard him with questions about his meeting with the High Lama. Predictably, Mallinson wants to know when they can leave, and Brinklow wants to know if they can get a missionary stationed here. Conway sidesteps all these issues. He says only that the High Lama is old, intelligent and speaks perfect English.

Mallinson gets angry. Conway was a hero in Baskul; why can't he be heroic now? What about the little Chinese girl? How did she get here? Conway does not answer. Miss Brinklow says there are no morals here. Conway becomes aware that he has to lead two lives. With his friends, he must act as if he wants to leave and return to India. Alone, he is content and enjoying the tranquility and expanse of time in Shangri-La.

Chang tells Conway that during his first five years at Shangri-La he was an ordinary man with regular passions and regrets. He was only twenty-two years old when he came and had been a soldier. Now, he is almost a hundred years old. He did not begin to age until he was 70. He has seen other men age suddenly and immediately when they leave Shangri-La. Their faces and bodies revert to the normal appearance of their true ages.

During the next week, Chang introduces Conway to some of the other lamas. One is a German named Meister. Another is a Frenchman named Alphonse Briac, who enjoys Chopin. Briac teaches Conway the unpublished Chopin pieces. Conway notes that each lama is highly individual. One old man actually knew the Bronte sisters and is writing a book about them.

Chang promises Conway that if he stays, similar things will happen to him. His personal past will fall into perspective, and he will be able to make better use of it. Conway settles into complete enjoyment of his life there. One day, Chang gives Conway a history of Lo-Tsen. She was of royal blood, a princess about to be married, when she arrived in 1884. This information makes Conway appreciate her all the more.

Conway wonders when he will next see the High Lama. Briac says it usually takes five years of novice. The High Lama spends all his days in meditation, so he is not interested in fellowship. However, the High Lama again asks to see Conway after only a month goes by. Conway again notes that the apartment has a special atmosphere and special heating and humidity to maintain the High Lama in his old age. The High Lama is pleased that Conway has kept everything a secret from his friends. He believes only Mallinson will give them trouble. Conway says that Shangri-La reminds him a little of the rarefied atmosphere at Oxford. The High Lama thinks that is a funny idea.



Chapter 9 Analysis

Conway's special treatment puts him at a distance from the other three passengers. At this point in the novel, he is a willing participant in this scheme. He is keeping secrets from his friends. He seems to be torn between his choices. Conway is very happy at Shangri-La but does not have the passion to commit to spending his entire life there. However, a lifelong commitment is precisely what Chang and the High Lama want from him. Notice that the names Meister and Briac will become confirmable facts later in the novel.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Chang is amazed that the High Lama requested a second meeting with Conway so soon. This has never happened before. He always waits until the five years' probation ends before he requests a second meeting. Chang says that the presence of human passions in newcomers distresses the High Lama.

The High Lama meets with Conway for a third and fourth time. They have wide-ranging talks about philosophy and history. The High Lama is convinced that Conway must have had extraordinary experiences to be able to understand such difficult topics. Conway says World War I aged him and made him want to give up his passion. In the next few weeks, Conway continues to fall under the spell of Shangri-La. He also falls in love with the little Chinese girl. He doesn't make any moves on her, because his sense of time has so altered. There is time for everything now.

Barnard has been down to the valley of the Blue Moon, where he goes to drink and socialize. He has begun to like it here. He wants to stay. If he leaves, he will be arrested. After he announces his intention to stay, Miss Brinklow says that she too wants to stay in Shangri-La. She believes that a mysterious power brought them all here, and so there is a purpose for her here. She wants to start a mission. Miss Brinklow is opposed to the lamas' idea of broadmindedness and moderation. She wants to fight it with all her powers. God is not broadminded about things, she says, and there is only God's way.

On top of the revelation that Brinklow and Barnard want to stay, Conway learns that Mallinson is also interested in the Chinese girl. A distraught Conway confides in Chang that he is worried about Mallinson. Mallinson will be devastated when he finds out that he cannot leave Shangri-La. He is counting the days until the porters come. Chang assures him that the porters will come as he said, but the porters will not take Mallinson or anyone with them. Mallinson will have to wait another nine months for another set of porters.

Mallinson will escape on his own, Conway says. Chang replies that no escape is necessary. They are not prisoners. Mallinson can leave if he wants. However, others have tried to leave, too, only to come back after one night in the cold plateau. The whole thing is very disquieting to Conway.

Later, Conway asks Chang if people here ever fall in love. Chang says Barnard has already availed himself of women here. Conway says he meant emotional love. Chang replies if he is in love with Lo-Tsen, she will respond without passion. He himself loved her many years ago. There is no physical love with her, but a man feels satisfied. She does not answer desire physically, but satisfies it by calmness. Conway again reflects on the complete happiness that he feels in Shangri-La.



Barnard approaches Conway and says he has discovered "tons" of gold in the valley. He was a mining engineer. He knows what a "reef" looks like, and this is one. He asked Chang about it, and Chang was truthful and showed him their operation. Barnard wants Conway to write up a report on official British Consul stationery about the mine. People will believe it. Barnard is willing to split the money fifty-fifty with Conway.

Conway continues to meet with the High Lama, who wants reports on the other three passengers. Conway tells him about Brinklow's plans to convert people and Barnard's gold mine. Mallinson is the only problem. The High Lama says Mallinson is Conway's problem. The High Lama is about to die. He is placing the future of Shangri-La in Conway's hands.

The High Lama also predicts a "terrible storm" that will trample every culture and force humanity into chaos, bringing a new Dark Ages. Conway will live through this. After he speaks, the High Lama dies quietly. The chapter ends with Mallinson pulling at Conway's arms.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Brinklow and Barnard want to stay in Shangri-La for reasons of human passion. Brinklow is intent on converting the people there. She hates their ideas of moderation and broadmindedness. Barnard wants to escape the fate waiting for him if he goes home and is captured. Neither has achieved the serenity of Conway.

The four passengers are symbols of four personality types. Barnard is the extrovert and sensual man who is interested in the here and now and making money. Mallinson is the controlling type who has a plan for his life and refuses to deviate, even when he ends up in paradise. Miss Brinklow has such unyielding beliefs about religion that she wants to change every human being who disagrees with her. Only Conway is adaptable and open to life.

At this point in the book, the reader wonders why Conway ended up in China at a Roman Catholic hospital if he is so content at Shangri-La, if he can become High Lama himself, and if two of the other passengers intend to stay there. When the High Lama speaks about another war, he is pushing Conway's buttons. Conway is afraid of war. The author's prophecy of a second war, already brewing in Europe, is fulfilled by history. The terrible predictions in this chapter seem to envision the coming atomic bomb.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Mallinson is very excited and agitated. The porters are coming. He wants Conway to pack up so they can leave. Conway asks Mallinson what they will do if the porters won't take them. Mallinson says that the porters have already been paid in advance. Lo-Tsen arranged it, and she is coming with them. Mallinson explains that Miss Brinklow helped him translate a conversation with Lo-Tsen. The lama wants to go with them. She is young, and this place is evil and dark. Mallinson thinks Shangri-La has had a terrible effect on Conway. He is losing his heroic qualities and becoming passive and stodgy.

Conway replies by telling Mallinson everything he knows about Shangri-La. He explains that Lo-Tsen is really an old woman who will become her true age when she leaves this strange place. Mallinson thinks Conway is out of his mind. He thinks even the idea that Talu brought the four of them here on purpose is absurd. As for the lamas living to be hundreds of years old, that is just physically impossible. Perhaps, Mallinson says, it is true that Conway was blown apart by the war. Conway says he is not going. They shake hands, and Mallinson leaves.

Mallinson returns some hours later. He is in tears. The passage out of Shangri-La looks fearful in the moonlight. He has lost his nerve and begs Conway to go with him. Mallinson fantasizes about blowing up Shangri-La and killing the High Lama. Mallinson again begs Conway to help him and Lo-Tsen leave Shangri-La. He can't understand how Conway can accept such a fantastic story without any proof. He can't understand the evidence of Chopin's undiscovered works because he's not a musician. But as for the rest of it, how can Conway swallow it without any proof? He must be crazy.

Conway says he is neither the hero Mallinson thought he was in Baskul nor the coward he thinks he is now. The truth is, he wants to stay here because he believes there will be another war. Then he asks if Mallinson is in love with Lo-Tsen. Lo-Tsen and Mallinson are the only two people in the world he cares about. Mallinson says he does love her. They have experienced physical love, and he is not ashamed of that. As Conway looks out on the night, his dream of Shangri-La dissolves. He promises Mallinson that he will go with him.

When they leave Shangri-La, it is a simple departure and not an escape. Conway feels he is leaving behind true wisdom to help Mallinson. After they cross the difficult divide, men on the other side help them on the rest of the journey. Lo-Tsen seems happy that Conway is with them.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Mallinson's common sense approach to Shangri-La shocks Conway into reality. If it is true that Lo-Tsen made love with Mallinson, then everything the High Lama and Chang



have told him is a lie. Later, when Conway himself is taken to the hospital by "the oldest Chinese woman ever seen," the truth about this chapter becomes ambiguous.

The story of Shangri-La, with its philosophy of perfect moderation, its lack of passion and its impossible longevity, does not make sense in any kind of normal reality. Conway can embrace it when he is with the High Lama, but not when Mallinson challenges him with common sense.

Can it also be possible that Conway feels he must help Mallinson? Mallinson is desperate. He cannot remain in Shangri-La, but he cannot make the trip alone either. Mallinson desperately needs Conway's help. Conway knows this. Staying behind in Shangri-La without Lo-Tsen and Mallinson would be self-indulgent.



Epilogue

Epilogue Summary

The story of the narrator and Rutherford is continued. This time, they are in New Delhi. Rutherford says he searched for Conway. The last thing he heard was that Conway had left Bangkok and gone toward the Chinese border. Perhaps he went back to the valley of the Blue Moon. The narrator says that he read the manuscript carefully. It is remarkable. Rutherford says he wrote only what Conway told him.

Getting back to facts, Rutherford knows that Conway left Baskul on May 20 and arrived in Chung-Kiang on October 5. Rutherford tried to get into Tibet, but the authorities would not allow him to wander around the Kuen-Luns on his own without a proper expedition. The range is very high and unexplored. It is impossible to find a passage through because there are no maps. Rutherford ran across an American who had hiked there. The American told him there was a cone-shaped mountain legend, but he had never seen it himself. There were only unconfirmed rumors of mountains higher than Everest in that range.

The American said that there were lamaseries in those mountains, but the monks there are corrupt and dirty. The yarns about how long the monks live are just that: undocumented fables. After all, none of these monks have birth certificates. However, the American did say that the lamas control their bodily functions through yoga. They walk naked in ice. The American knew nothing about Shangri-La or Karakal. However, he did come across a Chinese man carried on a sedan chair by natives. The Chinese man asked the American to visit his lamasery, but he chose not to.

Rutherford went to Baskul and Peshawar in search of Conway, but had no luck. No one knew anything about the airplane or its passengers. Talu knocked the original pilot unconscious and took over the plane. Since then, the original pilot was killed, ruining another promising lead. Rutherford heard about a German professor named Friedrich Meister who wandered around Tibet in 1887 and never returned. Meister was a name that Conway mentioned to him.

Rutherford could not find a record of Briac, Perrault or Henschell. Rutherford is fairly certain that Mallinson never reached China. Conway apparently wandered to Chung-Kiang on his own. The only thing they know for sure is that the nuns at the hospital treated Conway, and Sieveking heard him play Chopin on the ship. Perhaps the truth is that Conway went crazy in the war. One strange point is that Conway went to the hospital with an elderly Chinese woman, who died almost immediately of a fever. The two men wonder if Conway will ever find Shangri-La again.



Epilogue Analysis

The book ends on an ambiguous note, although it seems clear that Conway went back to find Shangri-La. The ending implies that Conway became the High Lama. Yet there is no sure way of knowing exactly what happened. Rutherford and the narrator have followed every fact that can be checked, such as the Chopin piece, the cone-shaped mountain and Baskul. Again, the fantastic element recurs. Shangri-La does not work in the everyday world of normal perception and reality. People who have experienced Shangri-La cannot remember it later. No one can set out to find Shangri-La. You have to be invited and led there by the residents. If that is true, then Conway could find Shangri-La because he was wanted there.

The 1937 movie of *The Lost Horizon* ends with Mallinson going crazy and falling to his death off a mountain when he realizes how old Lo-Tsen is. She ages in front of his eyes, and the sight drives him to madness. In the movie, Conway makes his way back to Shangri-La, where a lover awaits him. The movie also adds extra characters, eliminates Miss Brinklow and makes Mallinson and Conway brothers.

The legend of monks in the Tibetan mountains persists today. Movie stars and celebrities make journeys there and seek consultations with the Dalai Lama. This book helped to popularize the spirituality in Tibetan wilderness.



Characters

"Glory" Conway

Even as a young man, Hugh Conway has always shown a lot of promise. A "Renaissance man" at Oxford, Conway is gifted in drama, oratory, academics, languages, classical music and athletics. He is tall and handsome, a man who makes a good impression on others and makes friends easily.

By his own description of himself, Conway is always detached from situations and an observer. He is not controlled by his passions, which makes him somewhat of a lazy person without much ambition. This is why he never achieved the potential of his many gifts. Most people who knew him as a young man believed he would become Prime Minister of England. Instead, he is a British Consul in the remote post of Baskul.

Conway's detachment enables him to take the experience of Shangri-La with grace and curiosity. Unlike the other three passengers who get marooned there, Conway enjoys the experience and has no burning desire to go home. He allows himself to experience the beauty and tranquility of the place without an agenda. His spirituality, intellectual gifts and openness to new experiences make such an impression on the monks that they invite him to become High Lama, even though he has not been in Shangri-La very long at all.

Captain Charles Mallinson

A H.M. Vice Consul, age 25, Mallinson works as a vice-consul in Baskul. He flunked his examinations, which is why he has not been promoted to a better post. Mallinson resents being in Shangri-La and can hardly wait to get out of there. He does not believe one bit of the tale Conway tells him about Shangri-La. It is all nonsense and untrue. No one can live to be hundreds of years old. It is obvious that Lo-Tsen is a young woman, not an old lady.

Mallinson's character is in direct contrast with Conway's. Whereas Conway is content to enjoy and experience Shangri-La, Mallinson wants out. Conway is detached and has no family or friends. Mallinson is passionate and impetuous. He has a girlfriend and family in England. Mallinson hammers away about when they can leave and who will get them out of Shangri-La. He is unimpressed with the monks and does not calm down long enough to experience the tranquility of Shangri-La. He convinces Conway to leave with him.

Roberta Brinklow

A middle-aged, average looking missionary from the London Mission Society, she is one of the four passengers on the ill-fated plane to Shangri La. Miss Brinklow has no family



and few friends. She does not object to staying in the remote monastery because she intends to convert the people there to Christianity. Miss Brinklow is blunt and direct, described as a "Girl Scout." She is not a complainer as they endure the hardships of mountain climbing in Tibet and takes well to the experience of Shangri-La, although she is judgmental about the people. She has preconceived notions about morality and the way people should live their lives.

Henry D. Barnard

Barnard, born Chalmers Bryant, is an American, heavy-set and middle-aged, who is probably in the oil business. No one knows much about Barnard. Once in Shangri-La, he does not seem to want to leave. The truth is that he is wanted by the police in several countries because of his shady financial dealings under his real name, Chalmers Bryant. He cost investors millions of dollars in the stock market crash and now prefers staying in Shangri-La to turning himself into the police. He always thinks in terms of business and moneymaking, and asks how the monks finance their operation over and over. He comes up with a scheme to mine gold in Shangri-La.

Chang

Chang is the four passengers' guide to Shangri-La. He has been a monk for many years and has achieved tranquility of spirit. He is very hospitable to the four guests and takes pains to make them comfortable. Yet Chang is a devious person in some ways. He knows that there are no porters coming to return the four passengers to civilization, but he keeps up this fiction in front of Mallinson and the others. He answers most of their questions but keeps a barrier around certain subjects, such as why they were brought to Shangri-La. Cultivated and well read, Chang is the gatekeeper to the High Lama and allows only Conway to meet him.

The High Lama (Father Perrault)

The High Lama looks like a very old Chinese man in beautiful robes who sits tranquilly on pillows and rarely moves physically. In reality, he is Father Perrault, a Roman Catholic friar who came to Shangri-La from China as a missionary. He sent reports to the Bishop of Peking for years but then allowed contact to cease. After a near-death experience, he became even more philosophical, and now he devotes his entire day to yoga and meditation. Born in 1680, the High Lama is centuries old in 1933, when the adventure takes place. He explains the story of Shangri-La to Conway and asks Conway to become his successor.



Henschell

An Austrian who came to Shangri-La with the intention of mining gold, Henschell became friends with Father Perrault around 1800. He was an art collector who became the first person to trade goods outside of Shangri-La using gold.

Lo-Tsen

A beautiful and mysterious Chinese girl, she plays the harpsichord in Shangri-La. Both Conway and Mallinson fall in love with her, even though she is probably over 70 years old. She appears to be between 13 and 30. Lo-Tsen is very formal in her ways and rarely speaks about personal matters. Eventually she leaves with Mallinson.

Wyland Tertius

Tertius attended Oxford with Rutherford, Conway and Green. He is a secretary of the Consulate. He meets with Rutherford and the narrator in the beginning of the novel.

Rutherford

A novelist who went to Oxford with Conway, Green and Tertius, Rutherford is tracking down Conway's story for his next project. He has produced a manuscript about Conway's lost airplane and adventures in Shangri-La. He passes the manuscript to the narrator.

Woodford Green

Green is the narrator and writes the prologue and epilogue in the first person. He was a classmate of Conway, Rutherford and Tertius at Oxford and is now fascinated by Conway and the story of Shangri-La.

Talu

A young man who lives in the valley of the Blue Moon, Talu came up with the idea of using an airplane to get new visitors to Shangri-La. He is the pilot who dies in the airplane crash.



Objects/Places

Shangri-La

A utopia in the outer limits of the world, in a remote mountain range in Tibet. The small settlement of Tibetan monks believes in moderation in all things. They have no crime or war. Their health is perfect, and they live an unusually long life.

Tempelhof

The story begins with the meeting of the narrator, Rutherford and Wyland at this airport near Berlin.

Chung-Kiang

Conway ends up in a Roman Catholic hospital in Chung-Kiang, China in May 1931. He suffers from a mysterious illness and amnesia.

Baskul

Barnard, Mallinson, Conway and Miss Brinklow are all marooned in Baskul, Persia, the scene of a revolution that makes it an unsafe place for them. To escape capture and murder, they board a plane to Peshawar but end up in Shangri-La.

Chopin Piano Piece

Conway plays mysterious music he claims was written by Chopin. The musical experts who hear it know that Chopin can't be the author: such a piece would have become well known. Conway learns the pieces in Shangri-La from the High Lama.

"The Porters Will Take Them"

Chang offers up the myth of the "porters" who bring supplies in and out of Shangri-La. When the porters next arrive, they are supposed to take the four visitors out of the mountains. This is a mythical line that Chang repeats to keep his visitors happy.

Banana Boat to Fiji

Conway gives Rutherford the slip by transferring from a ship to San Francisco on to a banana boat to Fiji. He joins the crew.



Hooded Chair or Sedan Chairs

Men from Shangri La carry the old man Chang on a hooded chair when they first meet the four passengers. Conway and Chang later travel by sedan chair.

Karakal

A perfectly shaped mountain near Shangri-La, Karakal has mystical qualities. Its name means "Blue Moon."

L.M.S.

This is the abbreviation for London Mission Society, an evangelizing organization that employs Miss Brinklow.

Tea Ceremony

During the tea ceremony, people only talk "small talk." After it is over, there can be more open discussion. The High Lama and Chang are both masters of the traditional tea ceremony.

The Valley of the Blue Moon

The monastery community is in the mountains. Below is a valley where townspeople live. They have no need for government because everyone is courteous and virtuous. Barnard goes down there to relax and amuse himself.

Harpsichord

Lo-Tsen amuses people by playing beautiful music on her harpsichord. She rarely speaks or says anything personal whatsoever. Her recitals are formal.

Gold

Barnard correctly guesses that the monastery has access to a deep vein of gold that supports them in their endeavors. Barnard wants to mine and sell the gold with Conway.



Monastery Library

The monks at Shangri-La have a 30,000-volume library of books from many parts of the world and in many languages. They pride themselves on being up-to-date, but since time means little, up-to-date means little.



Themes

Desire Corrupts Mankind

The Buddha taught that nirvana is the end of desire for anything at all, even life itself. Hilton takes this idea and uses it to create his utopia. In Shangri-La, no one wants anything because everyone has everything they need. Children are indoctrinated in courtesy and etiquette even as toddlers. They are taught to share and let the next person have what you want. If two men desire the same woman, one willingly lets the other have her. Passion and ambition are bad form. The basis of all human emotion is desire, and when all desire is eliminated, you achieve a utopia.

People in Shangri-La do not "do" anything because they do not want anything. They read, listen to music, have discussions and share nature walks, but they do not compete with each other or perform work. Hilton's utopians live abnormally long lives because they do not experience any tension or yearnings.

Modern Civilization Contaminates the Human Spirit

Shangri-La is a utopia where there is no crime or hate, where people live abnormally long lives in perfect health and where there is no sense of competition or warfare. Shangri-La has no communication with or access to modern life. It is completely remote. The people there have a different sense of time. They do not care if a newspaper is dated today or two years ago. History is a slow process that needs eons, not days, to process events.

Hilton implies over and over again that Shangri-La is a perfect place because it is free from the contamination of modern influences like radio, movies and best selling books. Compare this to the beliefs of Muslim fundamentalists or former Soviet Communist leaders that rock music and television corrupt the masses. In some parts of this book, written in 1932, Hilton predicts a terrible human devastation that will ruin civilization. He could be predicting World War II and nuclear disasters. The forces that would cause World War II were already beginning in Europe.

Human Life Is Perfectible

Can a human utopia exist? What would a utopia be like? Would you need to change the basic, unchangeable aspects of human nature to create one? Modern psychology, evolutionary theory and theories of human hereditary all give us new food for thought in this area. In the period between the two great wars, ideas of human utopias were in vogue. Hitler wanted to create a "super race." Communism took hold in the old Czarist Russia and promised equality of opportunity and ownership of goods. Many intellectuals believed in the 1930s that if there were the right environment, human beings could live peacefully without war, crime or even the need for human laws and government. If

everyone is courteous and kind and agrees on proper behavior, there is no need for courts and laws.

After World War II and the first atomic bomb, writers began to create "negative utopias," also known as *dystopias*. Books like *1984* and *Brave New World* described a future where no one could achieve happiness and everything was out of control, where an attempt to create utopia only creates horrors. The idea of human perfectibility went out of style as people experienced first-hand the atrocities of war and the extent of human cruelty during the 1940s.



Style

Point of View

The Prologue and Epilogue are written in the first person by a narrator named Woodford Green, who does not really have much of a part in the book except to appear skeptical and give an "everyman" point of view to the fantastic narrative of Shangri-La. The rest of the book is written in the third person by a semi-omniscient narrator. The story unfolds through the viewpoint of Hugh Conway. Other characters' motivations and emotions (particularly the lamas') are only seen through Conway's eyes. The reader is privy to Conway's thought processes and evolving view of Shangri-La. The reader experiences Mallinson, Brinklow and Bernard the way Conway sees them, as conversationalists, fellow travelers and fellow guests at the monastery. Conway is the most adaptable and open-minded character in the book and takes what people say at face value as truth.

Setting

Shangri-La is an inaccessible community in the mountains of Tibet. There is a fairy tale aspect about the setting. Karakal is the most beautiful mountain Conway has ever seen, a perfectly shaped cone. The moon lights the area in almost a mystical way. The days are warm, but the nights are very cool. The community itself is a series of beautiful and colorful pavilions. There is tranquility not only of physical setting but also emotional setting. All the characters in Shangri-La except the four recent visitors have no passions or ambitions. They are tranquil and emotionless. This helps create the quietness of the setting. No one fights for anything or anyone, even love. Everyone is courteous, detached and tranquil.

Shangri-La has never been explored by any human beings except the ones who live there. It is entirely remote. The four new visitors have to climb with ropes up steep hills. Without a guide, no one could ever find Shangri-La. It is not contaminated by modern forces like movies, television or radio. Time moves very slowly in this place that civilization has passed by.

Structure

The Prologue and Epilogue of *The Lost Horizon* have little to do with the actual story. In the Prologue, three friends discuss the disappearance of an old school chum. The same is true in the Epilogue. These portions of the work create a framework that makes the central narrative further away from the reader's reality and adds ambiguity to the story. Is the story real? Or is Conway a lunatic? This framework also draws the reader into the story, bringing us from the more realistic world of Woodford Green to the fantastical world of Shangri-La. The middle chapters are described as a manuscript about the story of Conway and three other passengers when their plane is lost in the Tibetan mountains, but this story is only hearsay.



A narrator named Woodford Green tells the Epilogue and Prologue in the first person. The rest of the book is written in the third person with an emphasis on the thoughts and emotions of the main character, Hugh Conway, as he experiences the strange monastic community of Shangri-La.

Language and Meaning

In many ways *The Lost Horizon* is Hilton's version of a man-made utopia. When he is writing about the need for moderation in all things, when he argues that virtue eliminates the need for human laws and government and when he gives out other theories of the perfect society, Hilton uses persuasive writing and an argumentative tone.

However, most of the book is written as a narrative with rich descriptions of the beauty of the monastic community, the loveliness of the mountain environment and the emotional richness and fulfillment of leading a perfectly tranquil life. There are long descriptions of the gardens, moonlight, music and other aspects of beauty in the lives of the monks. Hilton writes about each character's physical aspect as well as his or her emotional reality. He allows each character to speak and think in an individual voice. The story is not a plot-heavy one, since nothing happens except that the party arrives in Shangri-La and experiences this utopia.



Quotes

"Conway was, or should have been, *great*. You and I have both known him, and I don't think I'm exaggerating when I say it's an experience we shan't ever forget. Even when he and I met in the middle of China, with his mind a blank and his past a mystery, there was still that queer core of attractiveness about him."

-Prologue, pg. 14

"The surrounding sky had cleared completely, and in the light of late afternoon there came to him a vision which, for the instant, snatched the remaining breath out of his lungs. Far away, at the very limit of distance, lay range upon range of snow peaks, festooned with glaciers and floating upon vast levels of cloud."

-Chapter 1, pg. 37

"'We didn't ask to be brought here,' Mallinson persisted. 'Heaven knows what we shall do when we get *there*, wherever *there* is.'"

-Chapter 2, pg. 41

"There came over Conway as he stared at that superb mountain, a glow of satisfaction that there were such places still left on earth, distant, inaccessible, and as yet unhumanized."

-Chapter 2, pg. 42

"It was an almost perfect cone of snow, simple in outline as if a child had drawn it, and impossible to classify as to size, height or nearness. It was so radiant, so serenely poised, that he wondered if it were real."

-Chapter 2, pg. 51

"'Our stay won't be long,' Mallinson announced curtly. '...We want to return to civilization as soon as possible.'"

"'Are you so very certain that you are away from it?'"

-Chapter 3, pg. 59

"There are times in life when the most comfortable thing is to do nothing at all. Things happen to you and you just let them happen."

-Chapter 3, pg. 65

"Our prevalent belief is in moderation. We inculcate the virtue of avoiding excess of all kinds - even including, if you will pardon the paradox, excess of virtue itself."



-Chapter 4, pg. 76

"They devote themselves to contemplation and the pursuit of wisdom."

"But that isn't *doing* anything."

"Then, madam, they do nothing."

-Chapter 5, pg. 100

"The flight from Baskul had not been the meaningless exploit of a madman. It had been something planned, prepared and carried out at the instigation of Shangri-La."

-Chapter 5, pg. 107

"The jewel has facets,' said the Chinese. 'It is possible that many religions are moderately true.'"

-Chapter 5, pg. 112

"We believe that to govern perfectly it is necessary to avoid governing too much."

-Chapter 5, pg. 119

"I will not try to describe the association that sprang up between [Henschell and Father Perrault]; the one gave utmost adoration, while the other shared his knowledge, his ecstasies and the wild dream that now had become the only reality left for him in the world."

-Chapter 7, pg. 149

"The years will come and go, and you will pass from fleshly enjoyments into austerer but no less satisfying realms. You may lose the keenness of muscle and appetites but there will be gain to match your loss; you will achieve calmness and profundity, ripeness and wisdom, and the clear enchantment of memory."

-Chapter 8, pg. 161

"There comes a time when the strangeness of everything makes it increasingly difficult to realize the strangeness of anything."

-Chapter 9, pg. 171

"The exhaustion of passion is the beginning of wisdom."

-Chapter 10, pg. 185

"Conway was silent."



"I place in your hands, my son, the heritage and destiny of Shangri-La."

-Chapter 10, pg. 205

"It didn't strike you that such a story needed any confirmation at all? You just swallowed it whole?"

-Chapter 11, pg. 222

"About that Chinese woman. Was she young? ... Oh no, she was most old - most old of one I have ever seen."

-Epilogue, pg. 241



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the philosophy of "everything in moderation, even virtue." Can a person be moderately honest?

Compare and contrast Conway's reaction to Shangri-La to Mallinson's. Which man is more open to learning and new experiences?

Three out of four of the passengers do not wish to return to England. Discuss the reasons they wish to stay in Shangri-La. Who wants to leave and why?

How does the terrain of the land contribute to the isolation of Shangri-La? What else about the place makes it so remote and mysterious?

Why did Conway decide to leave Shangri-La? Do you think he decided to come back there on his own? Discuss why or why not.

Jonathan Swift in *Gulliver's Travels* records ideas about government that are similar to those in *The Lost Horizon*. Both authors believe that if the people of a region are sufficiently courteous and kind, if they agree on what is right and wrong, then they have no need for formal laws and rules or even a government. What do you think about this notion? Do you believe such a society could ever exist?

Describe your own version of the perfect utopia.

If you landed in Shangri-La, would you want to stay there? Why or why not?